

Ancient Egypt - Old Kingdom

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Entry tags: Egyptian Religions, African Religions, Religious Group

The Old Kingdom in ancient Egypt consists of the 3rd to 8th Dynasties (c.2670-2168). This was the period of Egyptian history when pyramid building was a central feature of the cult of kingship. This is the first period of Egyptian history when there are substantial textual references that provide more detailed insight into religious practice. At this point in time, the king was considered the ultimate intermediary between mankind and the gods. The kings built monumental tombs - most of them in the shape of pyramids. The kings' favourites were then buried close to the king in hopes of spending an eternal afterlife in his favour. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, this strict hierarchy begins to loosen, and people begin to have direct access to the god Osiris, gaining more control over their afterlife.



Date Range: 2670 BCE - 2168 CE

Region: Peregrine_EarlyDynasticEgypt

Region tags: Africa, Egypt

From Peter N. Peregrine's Encyclopedia of Prehistory.

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Malek, Jaromir 2000. "The Old Kingdom (c.2686-2160 BC)" in The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt, edited by Ian Shaw. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 83-107.
- Source 1: Hays, Harold M. 2015, "The Entextualization of the Pyramid Texts and the Religious History of the Old Kingdom" in Towards a New History for the Egyptian Old Kingdom: Perspectives on the Pyramid Age, edited by Peter Der Manuelian and Thomas Schneider. Leiden: Brill, 200-226.
- Source 1: Muhs, Brian 2016. The Ancient Egyptian Economy 3000-30 BCE. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Reference: Brian Muhs. The Ancient Egyptian Economy. Cambridge University Press. isbn: 9781107113367.
- Source 1: Bard, Kathryn A. 2015. An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt. Second Edition. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Reference: Kathryn A. Bard. An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt. John Wiley & Sons. isbn: 9780470673362.
- Source 1: Silverman, David P. "The Threat-Formula and Biographical Text in the Tomb of Hezi at Saqqara" Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt Vol. 37 (2000), pp. 1-13

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/>
- Source 1 Description: Digital Giza: The Giza Project at Harvard University
- Source 2 URL: https://www.ancient.eu/Old_Kingdom_of_Egypt/
- Source 2 Description: Mark, Joshua J. "Old Kingdom of Egypt" Ancient History Encyclopedia

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.pyramidtextsonline.com/plan.html>
- Source 1 Description: Pyramid Texts Online - the Pyramid Texts from the Pyramid of Unas

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: The Egyptians sent expeditions to the south - the area of modern Sudan and Ethiopia commonly referred to as Nubia - to the northeast, in particular across the sea to Byblos in modern Lebanon, and to the West to modern Libya. The expeditions to Byblos seem largely to take the form of trade or diplomacy, while the expeditions to Nubia and Libya could become violent (Malek 2000: 96-97). There are also references to repeated military actions against groups referred to as "Aamu" in Syro-Palestine in sources like the biography of Weni (Malek 2000: 105-106).



Is the cultural contact competitive:

– Yes

Notes: The Egyptians sent violent expeditions to Nubia, Libya, and Syro-Palestine in order to exploit the resources of these areas and the people who lived there. For instance, the Palermo Stone, though it likely exaggerates, notes 7,000 captives and 200,000 head of cattle being brought back from Nubia (Malek 2000: 97).



Is the cultural contact accommodating/pluralistic:

– Yes

Notes: The Egyptians sent out many expeditions, sometimes for trade. The relationship with Byblos, in particular, seems to have been for the mutual benefit of the Egyptians and the people of the Near East (Malek 2000: 96).



Is the cultural contact neutral:

– No



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

Notes: The Old Kingdom seems to have been a fairly peaceful time within Egypt.



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: The Egyptians sent violent expeditions to Nubia, Libya, and Syro-Palestine in order to exploit the resources of these areas and the people who lived there. For instance, the Palermo Stone, though it likely exaggerates, notes 7,000 captives and 200,000 head of cattle being brought back from Nubia (Malek 2000: 97).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: In ancient Egypt, the existence of the gods was not formally questioned. When you were born in Egypt, to a family that worshipped the Egyptian gods, you would have been considered part of this religious group. There are, however, other specific cults and positions within Egyptian temples that required additional rituals in order to be a practicing priest or ritualist.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Does the religion have official political support

– Yes

Notes: According to ancient Egyptian religion, the king was considered to be divine, and the earthly manifestation of the god Horus. He was the intermediary between humanity and the gods, and it was his duty to maintain universal balance, harmony, or justice - a concept that by at least the Old Kingdom was referred to as "ma'at" (Malek 2000: 92-3).



Are the priests paid by polity:

– Yes



Is religious infrastructure paid for by the polity:

– Yes



Are the head of the polity and the head of the religion the same figure:

– Yes



Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

– I don't know

Notes: It depends what is meant by equivalent - religious officials and political officials would have both held high positions in society, but religious officials did not always have political

authority.

↳ Is religious observance enforced by the polity:

– I don't know

Notes: This is a bit more complicated - there is no evidence that the existence of the gods was questioned, or what might happen if you did so; however, there were actions that were considered sacrilegious that could be harshly punished, and participation in festivals and rituals seems to have been expected.

↳ Polity legal code is roughly coterminous with religious code:

– Yes

Notes: Again, this is a bit more complicated. Both Egyptian religion and what seems to be considered legal (though there is no formal legal code) is based on the Egyptian concept of "Ma'at", which roughly translates as truth, justice, order. However, there is no religious text with specific rules that are upheld as the law.

↳ Polity provides preferential economic treatment (e.g. tax, exemption)

– Yes

Notes: Certain temples, for instance, were exempt from paying state or royal taxes.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 1600000

Notes: According to Butzer's population estimates.

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Estimated population, percentage of sample region: 100

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Yes

Notes: The main group of religious texts from this period are the Pyramid Texts, mostly found on the interior walls of pyramids from the late Old Kingdom.

↳ Are they written:

– Yes

Notes: During the Old Kingdom, religious texts were written in Pyramids. These were sets of spells that helped the king reach the afterlife. Until the end of this period, only kings seem to have been permitted to write these texts on their tomb walls. These "Pyramid Texts" are the "earliest large religious composition known from ancient Egypt" (Malek 2000: 102).

↳ Are they oral:

– Yes

Notes: Although there is no definite evidence, it is assumed that the Pyramid Texts are derived from rituals that would have been performed (see Hays 2015).

↳ Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

– No

↳ Are the scriptures alterable:

– Yes

Notes: There are slight alterations in the set of Pyramid Text spells used by the different kings.

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting the scriptures:

– I don't know

Notes: Only priests and kings seem to have had access to the Pyramid Texts, but it is difficult to say whether, during this period, there was discussion of how the spells should be interpreted - this is not a revelatory religion. In later periods, however, later versions of the afterlife texts are found with comments about interpretations.

↳ Is there a select group of people trained in transmitting the scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: Only high ranking priests seem to have been allowed access to the Pyramid Texts, as they were written only in the tombs of the kings.

↳ Is there a codified canon of scriptures:

– No

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

— Yes

Notes: The Old Kingdom of ancient Egypt is known as the pyramid age, specifically because it is the time when monumental stone pyramids were built. The first monumental stone structure in Egypt was the step pyramid of king Djoser from the Third Dynasty. The most famous monuments from this period, however, are of course the great pyramids of Giza, belonging to Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. In the later Old Kingdom, sun temples were large obelisks were also constructed (see further Malek 2000: 85-101).

↳ In the average settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:

— Field doesn't know

Notes: Many of the settlements and monuments do not survive, so it is unclear.

↳ Size of largest single religious monument, square meters:

— Square meters: 52900

Notes: Each side of the Great Pyramid of Khufu is 230m in length (Bard 2015: 149).

↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:

— Height, meters: 146.7

Notes: The Great Pyramid of Khufu was originally 146.7m high (Bard 2015: 149).

↳ Size of average monument, square meters:

— Field doesn't know

Notes: Many of the settlements and monuments do not survive, so it is unclear.

↳ Height of average monument, meters:

— Field doesn't know

Notes: Many of the settlements and monuments do not survive, so it is unclear.

↳ In the largest settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:

— Field doesn't know

Notes: Many of the settlements and monuments do not survive, so it is unclear.

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

— Yes

↳ Tombs:

– Yes

Notes: Tomb of the elite in the period generally took the form of mastabas (flat bench like superstructures with subterranean shafts and chambers), while most kings built pyramids with attached funerary temples.

↳ Cemeteries:

– Yes

↳ Temples:

– Yes

Notes: The major temples built during this period were dedicated to the king and then, from the Fifth Dynasty on, also to the god Ra.

↳ Altars:

– Yes

Notes: Large altars were part of temple structures, particularly the solar temples.

↳ Devotional markers:

– I don't know

↳ Mass gathering point [plazas, courtyard, square. Places permanently demarcated using visible objects or structures]:

– Yes

Notes: Large courtyards are a part of Egyptian temples, perhaps as areas where individuals could participate in festivals. For instance, a festival court is part of the funerary complex of Djoser at Saqqara. Here the king would run the "sed" festival, which was seen to renew his power, and enable him to continue to rule Egypt. It is believed that the people, particularly the elite, would gather to watch this festival (Bard 2015: 141).

Is iconography present:

– Yes

Notes: The most significant preserved religious iconography from this period comes from temples and tombs. Like the Early Dynastic Period, images of the king smiting enemies, dressed in different regalia to show his different powers, is seen frequently in temples. More images of "daily life" are seen throughout the Old Kingdom as well, in particular in private tombs from the later Old Kingdom, but also on the walls of the causeways in the royal mortuary temple complexes.

↳ Where is iconography present [select all that apply]:

– On persons

– Only religious public space

– Some public spaces

Notes: On persons, if you consider the regalia worn by the king.

↳ Are there distinct features in the religious group's iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic):

– Yes

Notes: Gods in ancient Egypt could take animal forms, and were often depicted as such.

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic):

– Yes

Notes: The gods of ancient Egypt were often portrayed in human form.

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract symbol):

– Yes

↳ Portrayals of afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: In the later Old Kingdom, so-called "scenes of daily life" were frequently carved on tomb walls. These were meant to illustrate the workshops, and elite lifestyle that the owner intended to continue in the afterlife (Bard 2015: 170-174).

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols):

– No

↳ Humans:

– Yes

↳ Other features of iconography:

— Yes

Notes: Scenes of offerings, smiting the enemy, ships, and other offering goods are common themes on the walls of the processional ways.

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

— Yes



Are sacred site oriented to environmental features:

"Environmental features" refers to features in the landscape, mountains, rivers, cardinal directions etc...

— Yes

Notes: The monuments from this period are usually oriented to the cardinal directions. See for instance Bard 2015: 149.

Are pilgrimages present:

— I don't know

Notes: There is clear evidence that the tombs of the kings were visited frequently. The tomb of Djoser is known to have been visited for thousands of years, for instance; however, it is unclear whether these were formal "pilgrimages", as are seen in later periods.

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

— Yes

Notes: The Egyptians perceived that there were several different aspects of what we might refer to as the "spirit". Of these, there were the ba and the ka, two elements of a person's identity that were joined after death to create the "akh" the effective spirit.



Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

— Yes

Notes: After death, the body needed to be complete in order to act as a sort of anchor that would join the different elements of what might be considered the "spirit" - the ba and the ka. It was the ba that could leave the body and move through different spheres to accept offerings left by the living. (see Bard 2015: 165).

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body:

— Yes

Notes: After death, the body needed to be complete in order to act as a sort of anchor that would join the different elements of what might be considered the "spirit" - the ba and the ka. It was the ba that could leave the body and move through different spheres to accept offerings left by the living. (see Bard 2015: 165).

Belief in afterlife:

— Yes

Notes: For much of the Old Kingdom, the non-royal afterlife seems to have been conceived as a continuation of life on earth - where individuals were dependent on the king for sustenance and favours. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, however, individuals seem to have been able to attain a type of ideal life after death, indicated by the "scenes of daily life" drawn on tomb walls. Based on the Pyramid Texts, the king's afterlife could take several different forms - he could join his ancestors in the undying stars, the solar god on his movement through the heavens, or take up his form as Osiris, the god of the dead, in the underworld.

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: "Somewhat" would be a more accurate response. Especially for the king, there is reference to living among the stars, travelling with the sun, or joining the underworld of Osiris. Non-royal individuals seemed to have lived partly within their tombs, and a sort of parallel, idealized realm similar to earth. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, they began to have access to an Osiride afterlife - joining the kingdom of Osiris. But where, in relation to our universe, this may be, is obscure at this point in history.

↳ Afterlife in specified realm of space beyond this world:

— Yes

Notes: Especially for the king, there is reference to living among the stars, travelling with the sun, or joining the underworld of Osiris. Non-royal individuals seemed to have lived partly within their tombs, and a sort of parallel, idealized realm similar to earth. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, they began to have access to an Osiride afterlife - joining the kingdom of Osiris. But where, in relation to our universe, this may be, is obscure at this point in history.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "above" space:

— I don't know

Notes: Especially for the king, there is reference to living among the stars, travelling with the sun, or joining the underworld of Osiris. Non-royal individuals seemed to have lived partly within their tombs, and a sort of parallel, idealized realm similar to earth. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, they began to have access to an Osiride afterlife - joining the kingdom of Osiris. But where, in relation to our universe, this may be, is obscure at this point in history.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "below" space:

— I don't know

Notes: Especially for the king, there is reference to living among the stars, travelling with the sun, or joining the underworld of Osiris. Non-royal individuals seemed to have lived partly within their tombs, and a sort of parallel, idealized realm similar to earth. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, they began to have access to an Osiride afterlife - joining the kingdom of Osiris. But where, in relation to our universe, this may be, is obscure at this point in history.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined horizontal space:

— I don't know

Notes: Especially for the king, there is reference to living among the stars, travelling with the sun, or joining the underworld of Osiris. Non-royal individuals seemed to have lived partly within their tombs, and a sort of parallel, idealized realm similar to earth. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, they began to have access to an Osiride afterlife - joining the kingdom of Osiris. But where, in relation to our universe, this may be, is obscure at this point in history.

↳ Afterlife located in "other" space:

— I don't know

Notes: Especially for the king, there is reference to living among the stars, travelling with the sun, or joining the underworld of Osiris. Non-royal individuals seemed to have lived partly within their tombs, and a sort of parallel, idealized realm similar to earth. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, they began to have access to an Osiride afterlife - joining the kingdom of Osiris. But where, in relation to our universe, this may be, is obscure at this point in history.

Reincarnation in this world:

— No

Notes: An aspect of the king's spirit, the ka, seems to have been part of the subsequent king, and each one was an incarnation of the god Horus, but in general, there was no reincarnation in ancient Egyptian religion.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

— Yes

Notes: During the Old Kingdom, the practice of mummification became more popular, and the bodies were then frequently placed in wooden coffins within a tomb. Evisceration started as well - the major organs were removed and placed in jars - as was found in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres I, for instance. In the later Old Kingdom, facial features and other elements were sometimes painted on the outside of the linen that wrapped the mummies to make them appear more lifelike (Bard 2015: 165).

↳ Cremation:

— No

↳ Mummification:

– Yes

Notes: During the Old Kingdom, the practice of mummification became more popular. Evisceration started as well - the major organs were removed and placed in jars - as was found in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres I, for instance. In the later Old Kingdom, facial features and other elements were sometimes painted on the outside of the linen that wrapped the mummies to make them appear more lifelike (Bard 2015: 165).

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: Bodies were placed in coffins or wrapped in mats and placed within pit burials if they were poor, mastabas (tombs with subterranean burial chambers covered by flat, bench-like superstructures) if they belonged to the elite, and usually pyramids, if they were kings.

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):

– Yes

Notes: The corpse was more often flexed in the early Old Kingdom, and more often extended in the later Old Kingdom.

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):

– Yes

Notes: The corpse was more often flexed in the early Old Kingdom, and more often extended in the later Old Kingdom.

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):

– No

↳ Corpse is interred some other way:

– Yes [specify]: While the corpse was usually placed in a coffin and interred in a pit burial or tomb, burial in ceramic pots is also known.

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

↳ Re-treatment of corpse:

– No

↳ Other intensive (in terms of time or resources expended) treatment of corpse :

– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: The practice of sacrificing individuals for the burial, which occurred during the First Dynasty, seems to have been replaced by the burial of model workmen in the burial instead by this period, a practice that would continue for the rest of Egyptian history.

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

↳ Personal effects:

– Yes

Notes: Personal items are a key element of burials by this period, as they believed they would need them in the afterlife. Jewelry, hair ornaments, cosmetic palettes and materials, clothing, etc. are frequently found in burials.

↳ Valuable items:

– Yes

↳ Significant wealth (e.g. gold, jade, intensely worked objects):

– Yes

Notes: While many of the tombs from ancient Egypt are found robbed, there have been some incredible finds from this period. Massive sarcophagi had been found from several royal tombs, though we do not have any royal mummies from the Old Kingdom. One mostly intact tomb was a large shaft tomb belonging to queen Hetepheres I. In this the remains of ornate, gilded furniture were found, in addition to silver bracelets inlaid with carnelian, lapis lazuli and turquoise (Bard 2015: 163).

↳ Some wealth (some valuable or useful objects interred):

– Yes

Notes: Finely carved stone vessels are a significant feature of burials from this period. Some of these, particularly those in royal burials, date to earlier periods. Under the Step

Pyramid of King Djoser, for instance, storerooms filled with about 40,000 stone vessels have been found (Bard 2015: 141).

↳ Other grave goods:

– Yes

Notes: Food remains are frequently found within tombs, as well as models from daily life. Another more mysterious grave good includes "portrait-like limestone heads" with no bodies. These "reserve heads" may be backup images of the deceased in case something happen to their mummified remains, but this remains somewhat uncertain (Bard 2015: 162).

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: There are different types of burials based on status and position.

↳ As cenotaphs:

– Yes

Notes: There are pyramids that stand in for the funerary cult of a king, but the king was actually buried in a different pyramid. While they end up functioning as a cenotaph, most scholars believe that the earlier burials were intended to be the burial, but something went wrong and so they switched locations. There are also burials within a funerary complex that act as either the backup burial for a king, or for the king's ka, an aspect of his spirit. I think it is fair to consider these cenotaphs, but not as may be intended by the question.

↳ In cemetery:

– Yes

↳ Family tomb-crypt:

– Yes

Notes: Generally tombs are individual, but there are also burials of husbands and wives, and children as well. In the later Old Kingdom, these can get quite complicated - large family mastabas at Saqqara could have up to 40 rooms (Bard 2015: 171).

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):

– I don't know

Notes: There are few houses excavated from this period - while burials in houses are known from other periods, I'm uncertain if they occurred in the Old Kingdom.

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– No

Notes: This question is a bit more complicated for this period. For the early Old Kingdom, the king has his funerary cult seem to be the focus of much of the religious cult. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, the god Ra steps into particular focus, and comes fairly close to being considered a high god. The god Osiris also begins to gain prominence at the end of this period, acting as the counter to Ra.

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: If all the proper spells were completed, the deceased becomes an effective spirit, an 'akh', after death. It was believed that in this form, the spirit could accept offerings, and punish individuals who desecrated or stole from their tomb.

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– No

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirit's can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits know your basic character (personal essence):

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits have other form(s) of knowledge regarding this world:

— I don't know

Notes: Details about what the akh spirits know are difficult to ascertain for this period. There are few religious texts beyond short formulae for the non-royal individuals at this time.

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

Notes: If all the proper spells were completed, the deceased becomes an effective spirit, an 'akh', after death. It was believed that in this form, the spirit could accept offerings, help the living, and punish individuals who desecrated or stole from their tomb.

↳ Human spirits can reward:

— Yes

Notes: If all the proper spells were completed, the deceased becomes an effective spirit, an 'akh', after death. It was believed that in this form, the spirit could accept offerings, help the living, and punish individuals who desecrated or stole from their tomb.

↳ Human spirits can punish:

— Yes

Notes: If all the proper spells were completed, the deceased becomes an effective spirit, an 'akh', after death. It was believed that in this form, the spirit could accept offerings, help the living, and punish individuals who desecrated or stole from their tomb.

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

— Yes

Notes: Much of the afterlife seems to be based on continuing an idealized form of life in the afterlife, and continuing to be loyal to the king.

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

— Yes

Notes: If all the proper spells were completed, the deceased becomes an effective spirit, an 'akh', after death. It was believed that in this form, the spirit could accept offerings, help the living, and punish individuals who desecrated or stole from their tomb.

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

— Yes

Notes: If all the proper spells were completed, the deceased becomes an effective

spirit, an 'akh', after death. It was believed that in this form, the spirit could accept offerings, help the living, and punish individuals who desecrated or stole from their tomb.

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

— I don't know

Notes: Akh spirits can accept offerings, and bring rewards or punishments. It is unclear if they could directly communicate with the living, however.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

— Yes

Notes: A group of gods that have both human and animal forms were present in ancient Egypt.

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

— No

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

— Yes

Notes: A group of gods that have both human and animal forms were present in ancient Egypt.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

— No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

— No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

— I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings knows your basic character (personal essence):

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

— I don't know

Notes: It is unclear if the gods know what will happen

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have other knowledge of this world:

— I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can reward:

— Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:

— Yes

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

— I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:

– I don't know

Notes: The gods wanted offerings, and received food and clothing in temples - it is difficult to know if this was done simply out of respect, or if they actually felt hunger.

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– Yes

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:

– Yes

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– Yes

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: By the Old Kingdom, the concept of Ma'at, which translates roughly as order, justice, or balance, had been formally acknowledged in texts. It was the king's main duty to uphold this cosmic balance, but individuals were also supposed to uphold this order as well - which they maintained by acting as they were supposed to. If somebody did not uphold Ma'at, they could risk bringing down punishment. Individuals could also make offerings to the gods and request assistance. Tombs were also equipped with threats about entering when unclean, or about desecrating the tomb. The spirit of the owner threatened to make it difficult for the trespasser to enter into the afterlife (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: The gods or akh spirits might punish those who transgressed against the concept of order and justice, which the Egyptians referred to as Ma'at. What might count as transgressions against Ma'at is only partially recorded until later in Egyptian history.

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Food:

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Sacred space(s):

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Sacred object(s):

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– Yes

Notes: Murder is seen to go against the concept of Ma'at - truth and order.

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Other sexual practices:

– Yes [specify]: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:

– Yes

Notes: Lying was against ma'at - order and justice

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene:

– Yes

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: For instance, there are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

- ↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:
 - I don't know

- ↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done to enforce group norms:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done randomly:
 - No

- ↳ Other [specify]
 - I don't know

- ↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:
 - Yes

- ↳ Supernatural punishments in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:
 - Yes

- ↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of mild sensory displeasure:
 - I don't know

- ↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory displeasure:
 - I don't know

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form:
– No

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm:
– No

↳ Other [specify]
– I don't know

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:
– I don't know

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: This is a bit difficult to answer - the king was seen as an individual who brought order, justice, and balance to the cosmos, and was the mediator between the gods and mankind. While I don't consider him to be a messiah, there might be scholarly disagreement on this point.

Is an eschatology present:

– No

Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: All proper behaviour, both religious and conventional was guided by the Egyptian concept of ma'at, which translates roughly as truth, justice, and order.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– No

Notes: Not particularly, all proper behaviour, both religious and conventional was guided by the Egyptian concept of ma'at, which translates roughly as truth, justice, and order.

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: All proper behaviour, both religious and conventional was guided by the Egyptian concept of ma'at, which translates roughly as truth, justice, and order.

↳ Honesty / trustworthiness / integrity:

– Yes

Notes: All proper behaviour, both religious and conventional was guided by the Egyptian concept of ma'at, which translates roughly as truth, justice, and order.

↳ Compassion / empathy / kindness / benevolence:

– Yes

↳ Generosity / charity:

– Yes

↳ Righteousness / moral rectitude:

– Yes

↳ Ritual purity / ritual adherence / abstention from sources of impurity:

– Yes

↳ Familial obedience / filial piety:

– Yes

↳ Faith / belief / trust / devotion:

– Yes

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Monogamy (males):

– No

↳ Monogamy (females):

– Yes

↳ Other sexual constraints (males):

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

↳ Other sexual constraints (females):

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– Yes

Notes: There are certain requirements on individuals wishing to enter sacred areas. In the Old Kingdom, tomb "curses", or "threat formulae" are often found on tomb walls. They note that if anybody enters the tomb when they have done unpure things, they will be judged harshly in the afterlife. These unpure things include eating certain tabooed foods, or having recently had sexual interactions (see Silverman 2000: 10).

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: Human sacrifice seems to largely be practiced in the First Dynasty. After this, there were human models of servants that were also placed in the tomb.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

— Yes

Notes: "Require" might be a bit too strong a word, but individuals seem to have regularly made offerings to temples and tombs in order to ensure that the gods and spirits were content.



Other:

— Yes [specify]: "Require" might be a bit too strong a word, but individuals seem to have regularly made offerings to temples and tombs in order to ensure that the gods and spirits were content.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

— Yes

Notes: There were regular festivals that individuals took part in. Whether this was an absolute requirement is not clear.

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

– Yes

Notes: Individuals were expected to live their lives according to the concept of "ma'at" which roughly translates as truth, order, or justice.

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– Yes



What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to small-scale rituals.

– Field doesn't know

Notes: No texts make this type of information explicit.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– Yes



On average, for large-scale rituals how many participants gather in one location:

– Field doesn't know



What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to large-scale rituals.

– Field doesn't know



Are there orthodoxy checks:

Orthodoxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are interpreted in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper interpretation, etc.

– Yes

Notes: There were a precise set of actions and words that seem to have needed to be performed for certain rituals. The information that guided these performances was often protected and reserved for specific individuals.



Are there orthopraxy checks:

Orthopraxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are performed in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of

governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper procedure, etc.

– Yes

Notes: There were a precise set of actions and words that seem to have needed to be performed for certain rituals. The information that guided these performances was often protected and reserved for specific individuals.



Does participation entail synchronic practices:

– No



Is there use of intoxicants:

– Yes

Notes: Drinking was often a part of festivals and rituals. In later periods, there are possible references to other drugs as well.

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– No

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– I don't know

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A state

Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– Yes

Notes: There were both state and temple grain reserves that could be distributed when needed - though both of these were ultimately controlled by the king.

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: There were both state and temple grain reserves that could be distributed when needed -

though both of these were ultimately controlled by the king.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

— No

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

— No

Notes: While there is no institutionalized care for the elderly, tomb biographies often boast about caring for the elderly, which seems to be a moral duty.

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

— Yes

Notes: Much of the education in ancient Egypt seems to have been done in a process of internships. So while there were no "schools", education seems to have been performed by priests in temples. More formal education areas are noted in later periods.



Is formal education restricted to religious professionals:

— No

Notes: It somewhat depends on what is meant by "formal" education - but craftspeople seem to have been in apprenticeships as well.



Is such education open to both males and females:

— Yes

Notes: This is somewhat uncertain, but there are no references from the Old Kingdom that would suggest women could be educated in general - though they might be able to be trained as priests of female goddesses, or as weavers, if this is similar to later periods.

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: It somewhat depends on what is meant by "formal" education - but craftspeople seem to have been in apprenticeships as well.



Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

— Yes

Notes: This is somewhat uncertain, but there are no references from the Old Kingdom that would suggest women could be educated in general - though they might be able to be trained as priests of female goddesses, or as weavers, if this is similar to later periods.

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

— Yes

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

— Yes

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— Yes

Notes: The temples were often responsible for storing and redistributing grain, both in times of need, and as a form of compensation for work.

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: State work sites often had grain silos to provide food to the workers - though these do usually seem to have been for temples or tombs.

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

— Yes

Notes: In certain areas and sometimes related to public works, but this was not done generally throughout Egypt.

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: It's difficult to separate the religious group and the state in ancient Egypt though.

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

– I don't know

Notes: It is difficult to say - the Nile was the main source of transportation, and this was largely naturally supported.

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Notes: It is difficult to say - the Nile was the main source of transportation, and this was largely naturally supported.

Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– No

Notes: Technically, it seems that the state levied taxes, sometimes gathered and redistributed through temple systems (see Muhs 2016).

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: The king was the overall judge and head priest for all of Egypt. In this way, it might be said that the legal system was related to religion, but in general the judicial system was run by the vizier and the state courts (see Muhs 2016).

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The vizier and the great courts usually considered significant cases, with the king as the ultimate power - though he usually designated officials to judge on his behalf (Muhs 2016).

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– No

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes



Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– Yes



Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:

– I don't know

Notes: While some punishments are made clear, others are not. Death and beatings are noted, but it is difficult to identify other punishments.



Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

– Yes



Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

– I don't know

Notes: While some punishments are made clear, others are not. Death and beatings are noted, but it is difficult to identify other punishments.

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: The answer to this question depends on what is considered a "formal" legal code - there were legal proclamations, and royal exemptions, etc. but there does not seem to have been clear, formal rules that were set out for everybody to follow.

Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– No

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: While ancient Egypt did not have a standing professional army until the New Kingdom, individuals do seem to have been conscripted to the army by the state.

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: While ancient Egypt did not have a standing professional army until the New Kingdom, individuals do seem to have been conscripted to the army by the state.

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– Yes

Notes: Hieroglyphs are considered a sacred text, but they were used for writing both religious and mundane texts.



Is use of this distinct written language confined to religious professionals:

– No

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: Hieroglyphs are considered a sacred text, but they were used for writing both religious and mundane texts.

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: Hieroglyphs are considered a sacred text, but they were used for writing both religious and mundane texts.

Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Notes: It is too difficult to separate the religious from the non-religious in ancient Egypt - they all used the same calendar which was based both on the flooding of the Nile and religious elements.

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Notes: It is too difficult to separate the religious from the non-religious in ancient Egypt - they all used the same calendar which was based both on the flooding of the Nile and religious elements.

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Hunting (including marine animals)
- Fishing
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards
- Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes



Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Hunting (including marine animals)
- Fishing
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards
- Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Bibliography

Entry/Answer References

Reference: Kathryn A. Bard. An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt. John Wiley & Sons. isbn: 9780470673362.

Reference: Brian Muhs. The Ancient Egyptian Economy. Cambridge University Press. isbn: 9781107113367.

